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Former CBS film editor says program was faulty

By David Zucchino
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NEW YORK — For much of 1981, a boyish-faced, wavy-haired CBS film editor named Ira Klein worked on a documentary entitled *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception.* When the program became the focus of a libel suit the next year, Klein refused to speak to lawyers defending the network.

Yesterday, leaning forward nervously from the witness stand, Klein was questioned intensely by attorneys for CBS and Gen. William C. Westmoreland while testifying as the last of 19 witnesses called by Westmoreland.

His testimony offered an insider's reproving look at how the program was pieced together and how key editing decisions were made. Under questioning by Westmoreland's attorney, Dan Burt, Klein said he had told CBS producer George Crile that he believed that the program's documentation was "inadequate." He accused Crile in his testimony of ordering a series of editing cuts to deliberately distort interviews and events to incriminate Westmoreland.

In addition, Klein said, defendant Samuel A. Adams, a former CIA analyst and paid CBS consultant, told him shortly after the broadcast aired: "We have to come clean. We have to make a statement that the premise of the broadcast was wrong."

But under cross-examination by CBS attorney David Boies, Klein conceded that he had made disparaging comments about Crile and others at CBS — including a characterization of Crile as "a social pervert" and "devious and slimy." He also acknowledged that he was not familiar with the details of the broadcast and that he had not told Crile's superiors at CBS of his concerns until after the January 1982 broadcast.

Westmoreland has sued CBS for $120 million, claiming the network libeled him by accusing him of taking part in a "conspiracy" to alter and suppress estimates of enemy strength in Vietnam in 1967.

Klein, 33, who no longer works for CBS, described for Burt a number of incidents in which he said Crile, a defendant, ignored his warnings that Crile's "unethical" decisions had produced a program that was "unfair" to Westmoreland.

In October of 1981, he said, "I told Mr. Crile that he should ask for more time to continue his investigation because I thought it was inadequate."

Klein said he also told Crile and Joe Zigman, an associate producer who worked for Crile, that several interviews had been edited "out of context" by Crile for inclusion in a 1981 presentation to CBS executives. Crile needed the executives' approval to continue with the project.

Klein cut the air with his hand on the witness stand to describe how Crile had signaled him to cut the sound from a key portion of a 1967 television interview of Westmoreland. Klein said Crile did not want the CBS executives to hear Westmoreland qualify a statement he had made that seemed to support the premise of the broadcast.

The CBS program accused Westmoreland of minimizing enemy infiltration into South Vietnam in 1967 to make it seem that the war was being won. In the 1967 interview, Westmoreland cited a low figure to a TV narrator, but added that the enemy had "the capability of stepping up" infiltration. Asked by Burt whether the executives heard Westmoreland's entire statment, Klein replied, "No, they didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I lowered the soundtrack to the point where they couldn't hear it," Klein said.

On another occasion, Klein said, "Mr. Crile would not permit me to give General Westmoreland an opportunity to present his point of view" by including portions of Westmoreland's 1981 interview with CBS that Crile had ordered removed.

And nine days before the program aired, Klein said, he told Crile that Adams had told him that Gen. Phillip Davidson, Westmoreland's former intelligence chief was "as healthy as a clam." Crile has testified that he did not interview Davidson in preparing the documentary because he believed he was "on his deathbed."

Asked how Crile had reacted to the news about Davidson, Klein replied, "Mr. Crile just ignored me."

Klein also testified that he complained to Crile that Crile had "jeopardized the project" by screening his presentation for a former CIA official. That was later cited during a CBS internal investigation as a violation of network guidelines.

Under cross-examination by Boies, Klein first denied that he had told a reporter that he could not bear to look at Crile while working on the documentary. But Boies asked Klein to read a transcript of a tape-recorded interview with TV Guide reporter Don Kowet.

Klein read aloud to the jury: "I couldn't stand to look at him."

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George Crile
Said to have ignored warnings

"And who does that refer to?" Boies asked.

"Mr. Crile," Klein said softly.

Klein conceded moments later that he had also told Kowet that a CBS researcher was a homosexual.

Boies also played a portion of Klein's interview with Kowet in which Klein said three times that he did not mention Gen. Davidson to Crile after July 1981. Klein had told Burt that he mentioned Davidson's good health to Crile in January 1982.

In a series of questions about details of the broadcast, Klein answered "No, I didn't" or "Not that I can recall" more than two dozen times. He also told Boies that he had never done an interview or written a news story.

Challenged by Boies to explain why he did not complain to Crile's superiors about the program's alleged shortcomings prior to its airing, Klein said he had been "deceived" by Crile's assurances that he had relayed Klein's concerns to higher-ups.

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